



AETC News Clips

Randolph AFB, Texas



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Businesses laud reopening of base gate

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Chuck McCollough
Express-News Staff Writer

The reopening of Randolph AFB's main gate is making a lot of people happy. Two of them are Judy Lujan and Paul Leon.

The two restaurateurs were hard hit by the gate closure in the latter part of 2004 to facilitate construction. The closure, part of an \$11 million base upgrade, discouraged many Randolph employees from going off base for lunch because it took them longer to make the round trip.

The gate reopened Jan. 6.

Lujan, who owns Michaelangelo's Italian Restaurant, and Leon, whose family owns Felix's Restaurant, said 70 percent to 75 percent of their business comes from Randolph. Michaelangelo's had to lay off six employees and Felix's barely avoided layoffs, the two owners said.

Lujan said the gate closure was devastating for her eatery.

"I had to go to catering to make ends meet, and if the gate had been closed even a few more months I probably would have lost the business," she said.

Gary Carrera's business, Carrera Optical, is a short distance from the gate, but he said his business didn't suffer like nearby restaurants.

Carrera said he heard many people say they didn't want to deal with the traffic around Randolph during lunch and morning and afternoon rush hours.

"Many people, like military retirees who needed to go to the base commissary or to get a prescription filled, said it wasn't worth the trouble at those peak times," he said.

The Randolph project started in spring 2004, but total closure of the main gate was done in November of that year so the contractor could finish about five months early, said base spokesman Lt. Mike Villagran.

"Randolph is 75 years old, and these improvements were necessary. They benefit the whole community, not just the base," said Villagran, chief of public affairs.

In addition to increasing the number of traffic lanes from two to four each way at the main gate, the project includes:

A new guardhouse set farther into the base so more cars can line up without spilling onto FM 78

A new visitors' center

A state-of-the-art vehicle inspection station built outside the gate on the site of the old visitors' center

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Laying fiber optic and other communication lines under Harmon Road, the main road into the base

Resurfacing Harmon and improving its drainage

While the main gate was closed, Randolph traffic was rerouted to the east, west and south gates.

Villagran said he's heard some complaints that the new guardhouse gets in the way of the popular postcard-style photo of the Taj Mahal at the end of Harmon Drive.

A similar shot is available just past the new guardhouse, he noted.

"The (reason for the) location of the guardhouse is twofold: it provides better security infrastructure for the base and it gives protection from the elements for airmen guarding the main gate 24/7. I don't think anyone would begrudge them that protection," he said.

Universal City spokeswoman Kim Turner said the city is glad to see the Randolph project completed and is trying to measure its influence on the local economy.

"We have had a firsthand look at the work that was completed at the main gate and compliment Randolph officials and the (Army) Corps of Engineers on the completion. It will greatly assist in the ability to produce a greater flow of traffic on to the base during peak driving times," she said.

Turner said the economic impact was felt most in the early months of the closure.

"There was some apprehension that the impact would be rather large. However, though there was an impact, it was not to the extent anticipated. Overall, sales across the city have averaged about a 4 percent increase," Turner said, adding that is slightly below the state average.

"We are going to closely monitor the sales over the next several months to determine the full impact of the gate opening," she said.

Leon said he thinks his business will begin to improve now that the main gate is open.

"Only a handful of people in military uniforms were at lunch today (Jan. 9) so the gate reopening didn't make an immediate difference, but we are hopeful. My family will do some advertising to get the Randolph folks to come back," he said about the restaurant, which is named after his father.

Lujan said she has seen a fivefold jump in her business since the main gate reopened and hopes to be able to hire more staff in the near future.



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Luke AFB, Ariz.



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LIFE AT LUKE

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Airmen given fitness incentives

By David Madrid

DAVID.MADRID@ARIZONAREPUBLIC.COM

For the deployed airmen of today's Air Force, the front lines of Iraq and Afghanistan are everywhere.

Luke Master Sgt. Steve Wyatt, 39, has been deployed to both countries, and he knows how important physical fitness has become to the Air Force.

"You have to literally run to get cover, and you're in protective gear," he said. "We're on the front lines every day."

That is why Luke is in the midst of its Wing Warrior Wellness campaign, which sets realistic goals for active-duty Luke

"You have to be fit because that could be your life. If we're not fit, we can't run in all that gear and in hot weather and everything else."

Senior Master Sgt. Jose Gallardo

airmen to get into shape.

Judy Peterson, 61, Luke's special-events director, came up with an incentive program for all active-duty airmen on the base. They get rewarded for working out.

Now that the Air Force has physical-fitness standards, it is important for everyone to meet the goals. The incentive pro-

gram helps motivate those active-duty personnel who may not be working out as diligently as they ought to be.

The airmen can do a number of physical activities and earn points for what they do. For example, a 30-minute workout is worth five points, and there are different levels of workouts.

After they garner enough

points, the airmen receive prizes such as water bottles, shirts and caps.

"We're trying to pull people in," Peterson said. "This is something to just get them started."

Wyatt said the Air Force has had too many people leave the service in worse physical shape than they came in. That is no longer an option, he said.

Senior Master Sgt. Jose Gallardo, 44, is with the 56th Civil Engineer Squadron, the most heavily deployed Luke squadron. When called to defend your base, Gallardo said, an airman has to be ready to throw on

about 80 pounds of gear, grab a weapon and sprint to a designated position.

"You have to be fit because that could be your life," Gallardo said. "If we're not fit, we can't run in all that gear and in hot weather and everything else. It's pretty hot; 115 or 120 (degrees) is not uncommon over there (in Iraq)."

Fitness also helps airmen deal with mental issues such as stress.

Peterson said the base provides plenty of opportunities to work out, including a 5K run (3.1 miles) every month.

Luke producing top-notch teams

From competitive to intramural, men and women find place to play sports

By David Madrid

DAVID.MADRID@ARIZONAREPUBLIC.COM

When you think of Luke Air Force Base, you may not think of sports. Maybe you should.

Luke has a thriving sports program that encompasses 12 teams.

There's varsity men's baseball, basketball, hockey, softball, soccer and football, and varsity women's basketball, softball and volleyball. There are also intramural sports: volleyball, football, softball, golf and basketball.

About 2,500 athletes participate in the sports programs, with about 900 of them in varsity sports.

The Luke teams play against cities and other military bases, and they travel out of state. Luke is allowed to have open rosters so it has athletes to replace deployed airmen.

"That makes sense, because we are the Air Force, and we have to drop everything on the dime and go somewhere and defend" the country, said Vic D. Conyers, 51, Luke's fitness-center athletic director.

Staff Sgt. Nico George, 32, coaches the Luke Fighting Falcons baseball team. The Fighting Falcons play against cities at the Surprise and Peoria spring-training facilities. They also travel to play in tournaments.

"In the Peoria League, we do very well," said George, who comes from Los Angeles. "In-state, we're probably one of the best teams."

The team also plays Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, as well as other Air Force bases.

"There's no age limit," George said. "Whoever makes the team makes the team."

Senior Master Sgt. Jose Gallardo, 44, coaches the Luke Falcons in the Peoria adult soccer league.

Before moving to the Peoria league, the Falcons were 2002 and 2003 champions in the Tempe adult soccer league.

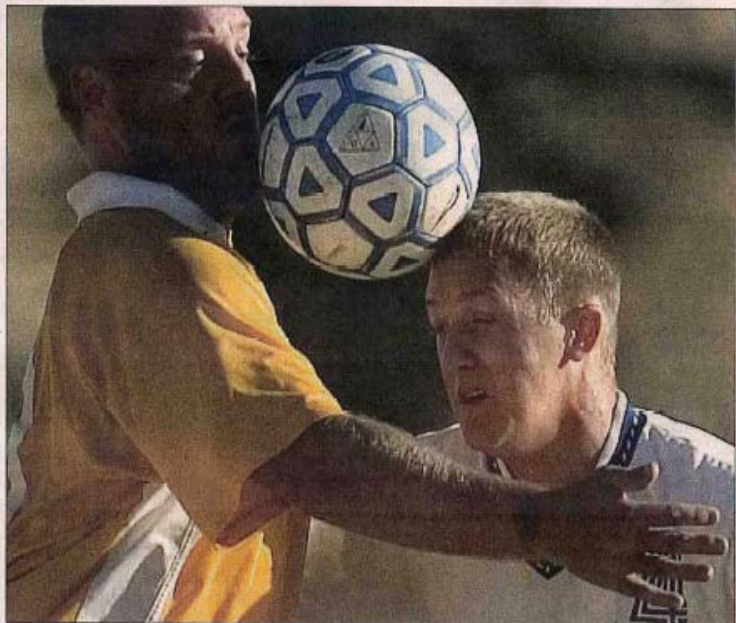
The team was the 2005 Peoria league champion, finishing with a record of 6-1-1.

Luke athletes can compete at higher levels.

"The Air Force takes the best players, and our program has provided male and female players to the Air Force" team, Gallardo said. "They get released from duty for a couple of months and all they do is play soccer."

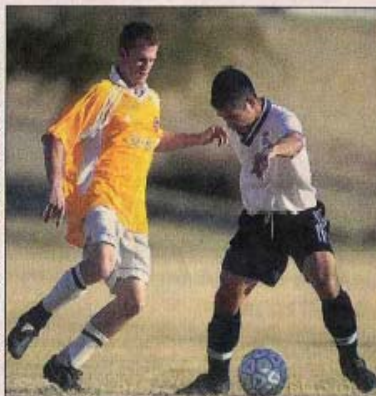
From the Air Force level, the players can be selected for the all-Armed Forces teams and travel the world.

"If you are a quality player, you've got a shot at the Olympic trials," Gallardo said.



PHOTOS BY YOKO FURUKAWA/THE REPUBLIC

Richard Rump (above, right) of Luke Airmen and Chris Vaughan of Banat Soccer Club get close during a recent soccer game. Thong Nguyen (right) attempts a pass.



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